Building Landscape and Landscape as World Building: Animal Logic, "Local Hollywood," and National Identity

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Abstract

This article explores the functions of landscape and its relationship to national identity within globally dispersed media production. Drawing on O'Regan, Goldsmith, and Ward's conception of Australian filming locations as "Local Hollywoods," I analyze the case of Animal Logic—an Australian animation studio recently acquired by Netflix—to illuminate the tensions between national companies and Hollywood studios as they attempt to forge creative identities and assert their corporate signatures over the franchised media they create in partnership. I argue that companies located at different levels of the corporate hierarchy involved in global production can harness the emotional component of landscape in the service of these goals in two interconnected ways. First, I show how landscape functions as a form of worldbuilding through the aestheticization of production. I then turn to Animal Logic's marketing, demonstrating how landscape refers to franchised "worlds" while invoking national industrial resonances—locations, skilled technicians, and internationally recognizable Australian directors and cinematographers—involved with their construction. I conclude by calling for more attention to the different ways landscape's national iconicity continues to be reimagined as global industrial relations shift.

Keywords: *Worldbuilding, Franchise Media, Landscape, Local Hollywood, National Identity, Media Production*

Consider the following two landscape images. First, a searing Australian desert pierced by the low glow of a setting sun. It is swept with dust, littered with rocks, and surrounded by rugged, golden mountains. In this landscape, a nine-year-old Aboriginal orphan is taken to a remote monastery run by a renegade nun, where he tries to connect the spiritual power

that emanates from the land to the figure of Christ that he is told to worship. Second, purple spherical clouds clustered together like sky-bound pillows, pierced by the logo of Netflix. They recede into a haze of softly painted rolling hills that surround an indistinct European city. In this landscape, an elephant is conjured by a magician's error, setting a boy off on a journey of impossible acts to find his long-lost sister.

Despite being embedded within such different stories, these landscapes have common origins. Both are constructed by Australian filmmakers. The first is by the Indigenous auteur Warwick Thornton for *The New Boy* (2023); the second is by the animation studio Animal Logic for *The Magician's Elephant* (2023)—the first animated feature the company made after it was acquired by Netflix in 2022. In certain respects, these films are reflective of the dual nature of the Australian film industry that has been theorized by film scholars for many decades, and the different ways in which landscapes are central to them.[2] On the one hand, Thornton's film represents locally made auteur cinema. Although auteurs have embraced a wider range of genre prototypes in their filmmaking in recent years, their cinematic landscapes tend to be naturalistic, referring to real locations or imaginary versions of real settings. In general, local Australian filmmakers also tend to work with a limited number of locations and eschew an overreliance on visual effects, partly due to budgetary constraints, because they are motivated by a desire to achieve an authentic representation of their landscape's real geographical referents and because they often have personal connections to the places and local communities that inspire their storytelling. This is in stark contrast to the landscape in *The Magician's Elephant*, which represents the big-budget, globally themed films described by Tom O'Regan, Ben Goldsmith, and Susan Ward as "Local Hollywood" productions that are made by a variety of countries, including India, the United States, Japan, and Hong Kong.[3] Local Hollywood productions have increased in Australia over the last few decades, and these involve the use of Australian post-production services and studios for both animated and live-action films, as well as split locations, the dispersal of creative roles, and the blurring of production and post-production workflows to create a wide range of place-specific and nonspecific fictional worlds.

Although I do not wish to conflate a company's work with a filmmaker's vision, conceiving these two landscape images according to a strict binary would also be a simplification of landscape's increasingly reflexive function as a sign that can mediate these two poles of the industry on a discursive level. Animal Logic is an instructive case study in this regard, as the company has both contributed to the internationalization of the industry over the 1990s and 2000s and worked towards establishing itself as an independent, national producer of its own franchised worlds. On the one hand, they played their part in the emergence of Local Hollywood productions that exist, as O'Regan puts it, in "storybook land," creating titles for *Babe* (Noonan, 1995), effects for *The Matrix* (Wachowski and Wachowski, 1999), and entire landscapes for *Happy Feet* (Miller, 2006).[4] Landscape in these films is a crucial aspect of the commercial stylistic system, an affective index for the franchised world that invites a different kind of identification than it did in Australian features in preceding eras. As Ross Gibson argues, the majority of Australian filmmaking from the 1970s onwards exhibits a "recurrent, almost mesmerized, preoccupation with topography," where landscape constitutes "both Australia's difference from the rest of the world and also the nation's (perceived) singularity of constitution within its own boundaries."[5] Yet, as Animal Logic pursued their goals to become

an independent Australian producer of global stories, they constructed a brand identity that depends on landscape's dual role as a culturally meaningful sign and aspect of contemporary style. At once, landscape in their marketing refers to franchised "worlds" while invoking national industrial resonances–locations, skilled technicians, and internationally recognizable Australian directors and cinematographers–involved with their construction.

Animal Logic's mythologization of the national industry signals an understudied aspect of landscape's functions within globally dispersed film production and reception. Landscape is most often considered within a national frame in Australian film studies, but what I want to illuminate is the way its national iconicity can also involve a reflexive aspect that implies industrial mythologies about the process of building landscape at the same time as it invokes a place of belonging. In doing so, I also want to demonstrate how landscape plays a role in world-building strategies more broadly. "Worldbuilding" is a concept that has been explored and debated within many different fields, not only within film studies and media studies but also in television studies, game studies, and new media theory as well. Despite its reach, in general, writing on worldbuilding remains concerned with questions of authorship and/or audience comprehension. For example, associated concepts such as "overdesign," "additive comprehension," and "world sharing" refer to the stylistic, narrative, and legal and economic tools that are used to forge creative identities as worlds are shared within and without the corporate body.[6] Landscape can be considered as one of these stylistic and narrative tools, but as well as drawing attention to aspects of design, narrative, and corporate identity, it also involves an emotional component that can be mobilized to control discourse as part of what Caldwell calls the "para-industry"–the industrial self-theorizations that function as mediated contact zones among media workers, the public, and production cultures.[7]

Before analyzing Animal Logic's self-mythologization within paratextual spaces, I will first show how landscape is operative at the surface of *Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole* (Snyder, 2009). Although this was the first project Animal Logic developed in-house through Animal Logic Entertainment (a production company they set up with the intention of eventually creating their own IP), it is Warner Brothers that uses landscape to assert their ownership over the film's world.

Landscape as Worldbuilding: The Aestheticization of Production

The title sequence is the most obvious place in which film companies assert their production identities and corporate signatures alongside the presentation of landscape. Consider, for example, the opening of *Legend of the Guardians*. The film begins with a shot of the galaxy and the grand sounds of a brass orchestra, immediately situating the audience in the realm of the sublime with an awe-inspiring sonic and visual display. Slowly, red and purple light shines upward into the cosmos as the camera gradually tilts downward toward the earth, and we hear the screech of an owl. This transition brings us closer to the terrestrial and primes us for the sudden rush of the owl swooping into frame. The camera follows it closely, now in the clouds, the sun beaming on the horizon. But it is not the sublimity of an infinite horizon

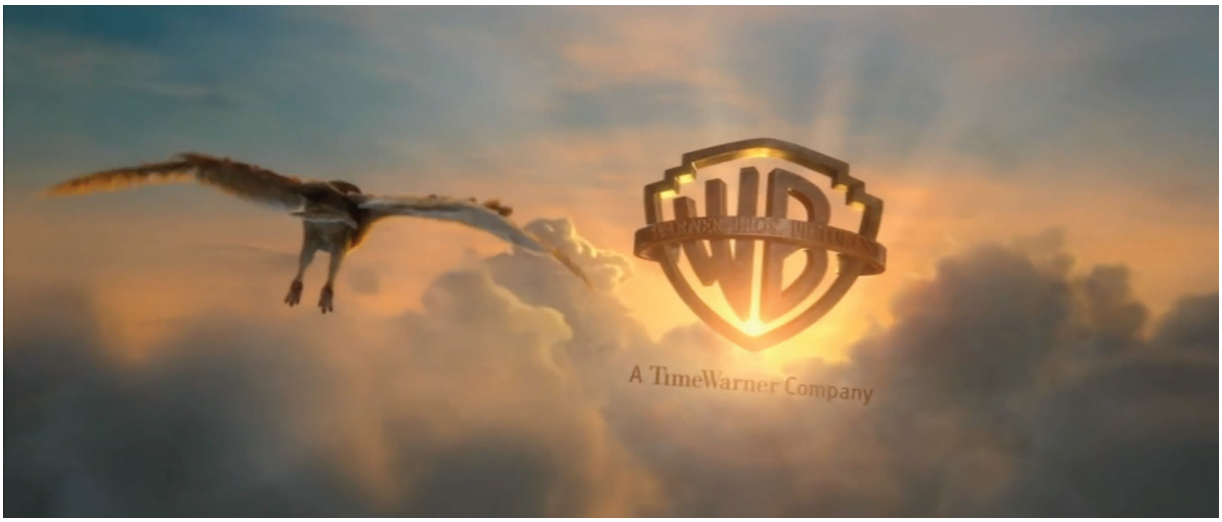

Figure 1. *Legend of the Guardians*' title sequence.

that the owl is flying toward. The owl soars through an enormous Warner Brothers logo (Figure 1), now at a speed that allows us to take in the landscape, the logo, and the dexterity of the bird's movement. We follow the owl looping its way through the clouds, and the Village Roadshow logo appears. As the bird flies through it, the camera rushes in and gives us a closer look at its face, its eyes, beak, and feathers, allowing for a moment of identification that foreshadows the owl's introduction as a main protagonist. The camera rapidly pans with the bird as it moves across the frame and guides our attention, with a swell of music, to the main title. As the owl moves through the title, their speed rapidly accelerates just as a feather it leaves behind floats in slow motion toward the center of the frame. The owl screeches and plummets downward through the clouds and the camera resumes its speed, now giving us an aerial view of a stunning waterfall. In the final moments of the sequence, the camera does a 360 around the owl, showing off the mountainous terrain (Figure 2).

This sequence is typical of landscape's role in the coproduced franchise film that could be set anywhere. At once, it invites us to respond to natural iconography—mountains, waterfalls, and horizons—as well as the virtuosity of the studios and creators who produced them with a sense of awe and reverence. This is not necessarily new but an aspect of worldbuilding that is closely related to what David Bordwell calls "worldmaking," or the construction of "richly articulated worlds" that were once the domain of set designers and dressers in the studio era.[8] Science fiction would take the concrete milieu to a new level, and Bordwell speculates that the turn toward location shooting might have eventually motivated filmmakers in other genres to aestheticize production processes in their creation of "layered worlds, complete with brand names and logos."[9] Today, as Henry Jenkins argues, the industrial push toward franchising has enabled "transmedia storytelling," where this kind of worldbuilding is pursued across multiple media and platforms.[10] Consequently, the aestheticization of production necessitates finding ways to direct attention to both the vista and details within the mise-en-scène that help align it with recognizable brands that have been established outside the primary text. For example, LEGO landscapes (first designed by Animal Logic for Warner Brothers' *The LEGO Movie* (Miller and

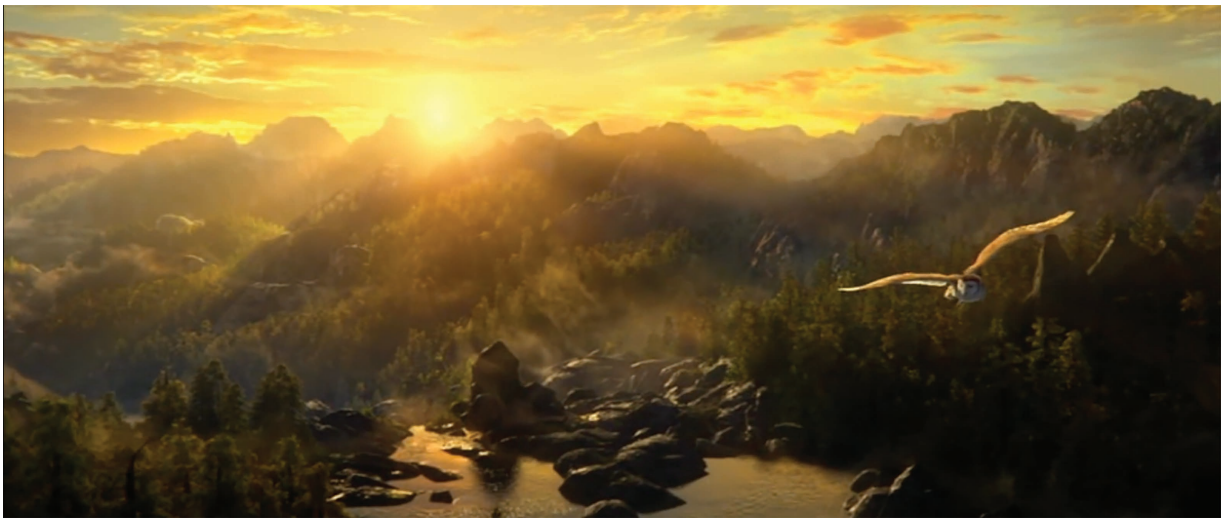

Figure 2. The roaming camera shows off the mountainous terrain.

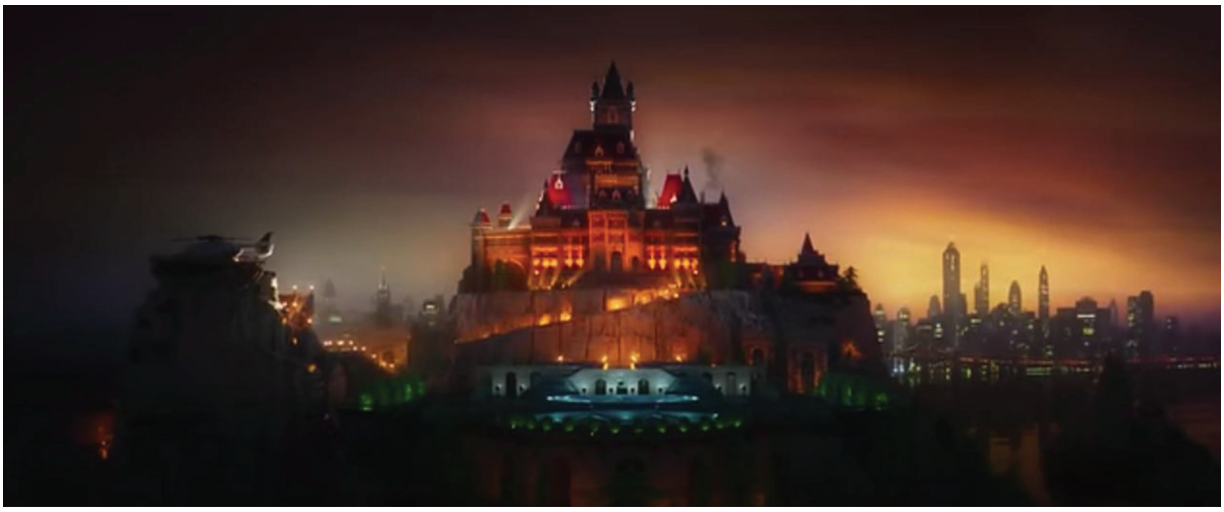

Figure 3. Gotham City skyline in *The Lego Batman Movie* (2017).

Lord, 2014)) are made of digital bricks that refer to the LEGO franchise itself. At the same time, in spinoffs and sequels, they also contain recognizable features of the intellectual property that is owned by companies under the Warner Bros. Picture Group such as the gothic architecture and piercing skyline of Gotham City (Figure 3); the Chuck Jones inspired setting of the Looney Tunes world; or the digital world of *The Matrix* movies—comprising the code that in the story of *Resurrections* (2021) is responsible for the "resurrection" of Warner Brothers' back catalog within the film itself. Like in *Legend*'s title sequence, the camera rips through these worlds at a frantic pace but lingers on branded landscape shots to invite an emotional response to both the dominant story and the studio's practice.

This kind of contemporary self-reflexivity often involves an acknowledgment of the talent and production companies that collaborate with major studios, but *Legend*'s title sequence

is indicative of the corporate hierarchy at work in the international coproduction. Neither Zack Snyder nor Animal Logic get to have their names floating majestically in the clouds, as priority is given to Warner Brothers, who had bought the rights to the film in 2005, and to Village Roadshow Pictures, who co-financed and distributed the film in Australia. Warner Brothers and their Australian partners remind the viewer that the intellectual property belongs to them, but for viewers who are familiar with Snyder's films, the scene also contains clear indications of directorial authorship. The prowling camera and the use of a long take to frame continuous action, the simulation of drone-operated cinematography, and the rich color palette are all distinctive features of his style. These are also common conventions of contemporary Hollywood style, but Snyder's signature is most clearly foregrounded with the use of the speed ramping effect that slows down the feather and speeds up the owl as it flies through the main title graphics. Indeed, the feather fuses Animal Logic's and Snyder's brand into a single image (Figure 4). Since Snyder made the historical action film 300 (2006), his use of ramp speed in action sequences has been vigorously derided and defended by critics and fans, and the simulation of the owls' feathers and Snyder's trademark zoom sequences have been a major focus point for Animal Logic personnel when discussing the challenges of making the film in interviews and in promotional material.[11] For the savvy audience, knowing fans, and other industry practitioners and commentators, once they see this image and the owl immediately plummets from the clouds to the earth, it will be clear that the awe-inspiring horizons in the sky above and the beauty of the landscape below have been made possible through a collaboration between Snyder and the Australian studio.

Although Animal Logic is not able to brand their world directly in the landscape in the blatant manner of studios like Warner Bros., the company routinely circulates promotional material online that emphasizes their role in constructing landscapes. This promotional material works in much the same way as the ambiguous allusions to production processes within films like *Legend* by generating fan discourse and speculation about the lore of the

Figure 4. ECU of feather in *Legend of the Guardians*' title sequence.

franchise and its surrounding industrial mythology. Indeed, Thomas Elsaesser has shown that textual ambiguity forms the basis for studios' and directors' control over their films' reception, offering multiple and even contradictory entry points for identification, while the studio's self-mythology provides these allusions with a unified textual coherence.[12] As a vendor for major studios that prioritize their own mythologies in the primary text, the circulation of promotional material online helps render allusions to their work (like the feather in *Legend*) meaningful for audiences while contributing to an industrial mythology that they would mobilize as they continued to aspire toward developing their own IP.

In this respect, landscape takes on multiple functions in their marketing, particularly as it pertains to their development of software and digital tools. As Lev Manovich argues, it is software innovation that drives the specific industrial organization of the animation and post-production fields.[13] Within this context, landscape functions as an "icon of mimesis" that allows companies to stay competitive by showing how their software can simulate the profilmic qualities of the real world—such as details in the environment and its physics—and established cinematic codes.[14] Concomitantly, Animal Logic also emphasizes the digital tools and production practices they use to build landscape to construct a brand identity that gestures towards their national origins. This further distinguishes their company among competitors and knowledgeable industry consumers, while also contributing to a cohesive self-mythology that reflects the characters, themes, and values of their franchise films—elements that resonate with a broader audience.

Although landscape plays a central role in Animal Logic's earlier marketing, their self-mythology is most visible in the material surrounding the software packaged in the "ALab project." This project was a multiphase contribution to Pixar's "Universal Scene Description" (USD)—an open-source initiative that allows 3D data to be rapidly exchanged across different content creation apps such as Maya, Katana, and Houdini. In 2021, the company released the first implementation of a complete USD production scene, which demonstrated the ability to share and modify entire scenes across complex digital pipelines. At the same time, the project would allow their workers to test out new software and digital tools, concepts, and ideas for future development while helping them develop the Animal Logic brand. In an interview with Animation World Network, Grant Freckelton, ALab's art director, explained the initial motivation driving the company:

> A few years ago, we realized that we were doing a lot of testing in a very ad hoc little setup that inexplicably had snow and a little gingerbread house and a weird 3D version of the Animal Logic logo. And that was how we were putting ourselves forward in any sort of presentation. If we were testing something, there would just be this silly Animal Logic logo in a snowy environment. And we came to the realization that we needed something that was a little more cohesive and was more representative of Animal Logic. That's how the ALab project started.[15]

To construct this cohesive brand identity, the team working on the project used the world-building strategies I have outlined above in promotional videos and shortform content released alongside the open-source toolset. In doing so, the company inserted their achievements within a national industrial mythology that celebrates the construction of landscape while signaling their desire to produce franchised worlds of their own.

Building Landscape: National Identity and Local Hollywood

In 2022, Animal Logic released a promotional video advertising the second phase of the ALab project. In the video, the company asserts ownership over the diegesis in the same way that Warner Brothers does in *Legend*: by moving us through spaces that are replete with allusions to the company's own history and values. Rather than soaring through a landscape that is suggestive of the practices that brought it forth, however, we are moving through a workshop in which the tools of production are directly on display. It is not the smooth movement of a prowling camera that dazzles us either. Here, we assume the perspective of an "unseen inventor" filming with a Super 8 camera with enough shake to suggest handheld movement. The cuts are also just abrupt enough to indicate that we are watching an unedited reel, but at the same time, the scene maintains continuity as it roams through the industrial simulacrum.

This blurring of cinematic styles of the past and present is central to the mythology that the company is offering the viewer. For example, temporal ambiguity also informs the mise-en-scène, as retro fonts that evoke 1970s exploitation movies introduce two characters that refer to crucial moments for the company's success as a digital animation studio. There is "Dr. Goggles McPheretson PHD," a ferret that is reminiscent of the various furry heroes in their movies, and "Hinge: the metric-electric recycled robotron," who evokes the constructed minifigs that brought the studio commercial and critical acclaim with *The LEGO Movie*. The characters' interactions with their environment recall *The LEGO Movie*'s exploration of the tension between creative expression and commerce through irreverence and self-conscious humor: Dr. Goggles rides a piggy bank with glee on a 1970s turntable, and Hinge shakes his robot head in shame before taking his turn and commenting directly on his experience as the record spins slowly ("this is pleasant") and quickly ("this is not pleasant"). The collapse of temporalities, technologies, and thematic allusions continues as the camera moves through the environment to pause on more assets/Goggles' inventions, such as an augmented reality headset for ferrets that ironically promises it is "not vaporware" and jokingly asks the viewer to "invest now!" (Figure 5).

This is a fittingly self-conscious and efficient way to remind the viewer of Animal Logic's brand while acknowledging the tensions involved with releasing open-source software that facilitates the commercial operations of major corporate entities like Pixar. At the same time, this simple theme is developed in other projects, encouraging what Jenkins calls "additive comprehension" by anchoring the ALab scene with a narrative.[16] On the website promoting ALab, for example, the scene is described as

> An abandoned workshop. A labyrinth of jerry-built experiments tangled purposely with nostalgic toys from the childhood of an unseen inventor. The scene is an early 1970s Australian backyard lab and leans into a nostalgic aesthetic that will feel familiar to anyone that has spent time in Animal Logic's studios.[17]

On another webpage, the description of the material indicates that Animal Logic's Sydney studios are adorned with camera equipment and that one of the two characters is given a

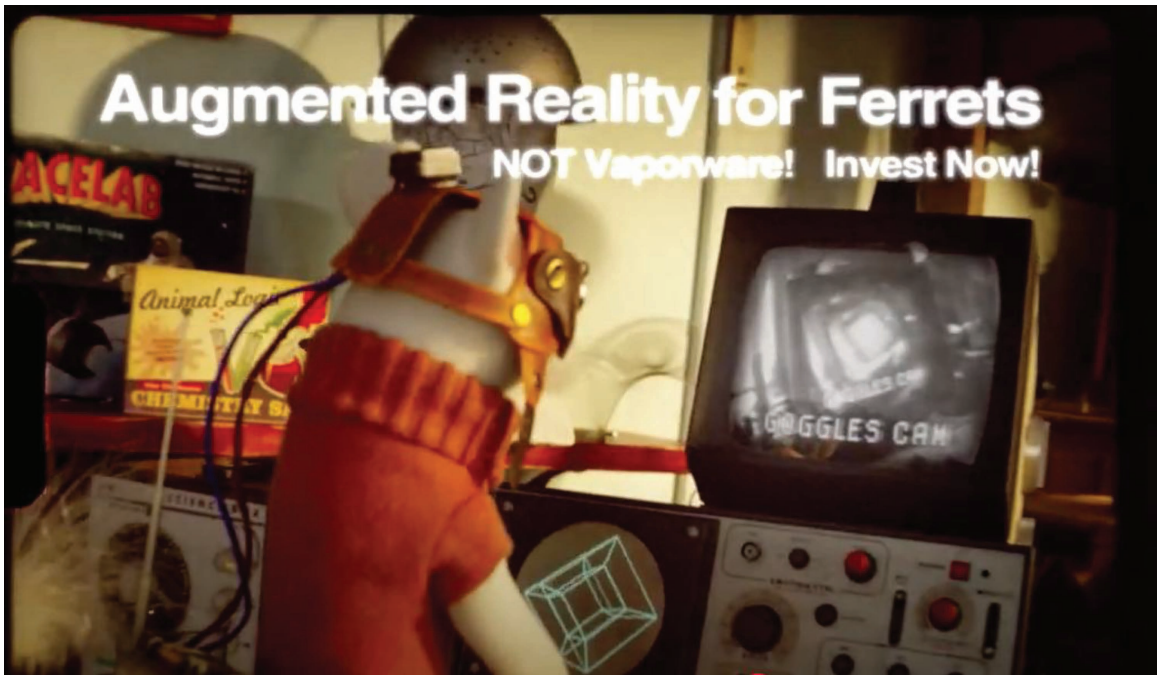

Figure 5. Dr. Goggles tries augmented reality for ferrets.

leather cap with a heads-up display made of toy cameras as a "little wink to Animal Logic's collection."[18] In these paratexts, the company explicitly positions the scene as a heterotopic space that parallels their own studios, but it is projected back into a pre-digital era of Australian filmmaking. As the scene circulates alongside these other reflexive texts, the company's brand identity accrues significance as it becomes associated with broader industrial mythologies that feature Animal Logic at the center.

For instance, the image of a lone inventor working at an "Australian backyard lab" asserts a narrative of independent national production that paradoxically aligns with the reputation the company has developed as an influential force in the Australian industry's internationalization. As a "digital services provider" throughout the 1990s, the company gained a reputation for "innovation" and "flexibility" by offering a wide range of services for digital production, including the production of visual effects and software development for film, television, new media, and animation. This activity would help them secure their entry into feature film production with *Happy Feet*, and eventually, the success of *The LEGO Movie* would help convince the government to open the rebate for overseas digital production within Australia (the Post, Digital, and Visual Effects [PDV] offset). [19] This association remains strong within the national funding body Screen Australia's own marketing today (Figure 6).

Yet, if the company foregrounds its contemporary business values by emphasizing Dr. Goggles' "innovations," it is not their significance in boosting the Australian post-production industry that they mythologize–it is the broader environment of innovation that is tied to celebrated individuals within Australian filmmaking practice. Just as debates over internationalization often center on the significance of landscape, Australian film history is

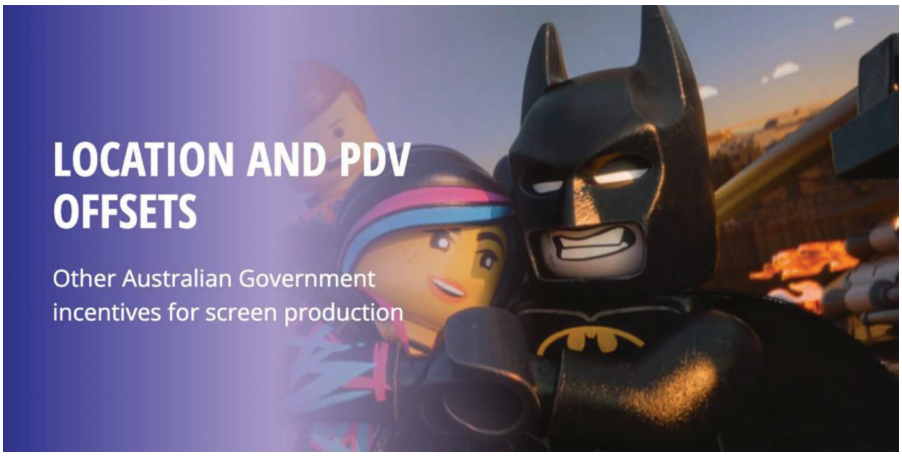

Figure 6. Screen Australia's promotion for the location and PDV offsets featuring characters from *The LEGO Movie*.

rich with anecdotes and debates over the practices that individuals have used or technologies they have invented to incorporate landscapes into their filmmaking in the absence of facilities and finances. We can see this in regard to filmmakers of every decade in the pre-digital era, from Arthur Higgins' experimentation with rough chemical solutions to overcome the lack of light meters in the silent era; Ken G. Hall's purchase of a rear projector to modernize the industry in the 1930s; Charles Chauvel's "locationism" in the 1940s and 1950s; to the film school-educated cinematographers and auteurs of the "Australian New Wave" in the 1970s.[20] Choosing the early 1970s as the specific historical setting for their scene evokes this national industrial mythology directly by implying the "film revival": the government-supported revitalization of the industry that consolidated Australia's reputation for producing auteur-made, landscape-themed cinema.

At the same time as this mythology aligns the company with a local and artisanal mode of production, it implicates the Australian industry's transnational aspects by emphasizing the role of below-the-line workers rather than the celebrated auteur. Aside from their location within a geographically defined nation, this worker's attachments only consist of products and practices–there is no suggestion of the axes of difference (race, gender, and so forth) that construct our social locations, nor any values that typically comprise individual and collective identity narratives. The worker only expresses values like play, exploration, and the imagination that refer to the company's own brand identity. We do not see the "inventor" at all–Dr. Goggles stands in for them as both an implied hand puppet and an animated character suggestive of the franchised products that the technician has created for the global market. This allows the company to insert its mythology into a more fundamental historical reality that is increasingly being acknowledged by film scholars: although the Australian post-production industry has only recently emerged as an important node in Hollywood's global mode of production, the national film industry has always been porous, creating cross-cultural formations of industry, practice, and culture in dialog.

What has gradually changed with the implementation of digital technologies and studio production methods in Australia is the need for faster pipelines and fluid workflows, which

software like USD–and technicians like Dr. Goggles–helps facilitate. In the digital era, building landscape necessitates a greater dispersal of creative roles as landscape images must travel through a complex pipeline that involves many different departments within the studio: from previsualization, through to modeling, surfacing, rigging, grooming, animation, lighting, and grading. Accordingly, Animal Logic routinely emphasizes the creative decisions made by technicians working on landscape at each stage of the digital pipeline in their marketing. This includes the creative collaboration between cinematographers and animators to produce landscapes that resemble Antarctica in *Happy Feet* and Tasmania in *Legend*; the innovative practices that were necessitated by a hybrid mix of location shooting and rear projection to create the various landscapes that appear in *Peter Rabbit* (Gluck, 2018); and the creativity of software developers and workers in modeling and rigging departments for "LEGOscape" (software that enabled the production of landscapes to resemble an assemblage of LEGO bricks for *The LEGO Movie*). In this promotional material, the company advertises their ability to solve creative problems involved with building landscape by attaching their development of software and production techniques to the franchises they make in partnership with major studios.

In the ALab material, however, allusions to these franchises are subordinated to the primary narrative, allowing Animal Logic to assert their aspirations as a producer of franchised media of their own. By prioritizing a story that is suggestive of their future aspirations and their national origins over their past as a vendor for other studios, they effectively inverted the corporate hierarchy established by Warner Brothers in *Legend*'s opening sequence discussed above. For example, while Dr. Goggles' and Hinge's "play" in the backyard lab is suggestive of themes explored in *The LEGO Movie* franchise, they primarily function as a condensation of the production practices and processes advertised in Animal Logic's earlier promotional material, producing futuristic virtual media (like the augmented reality headset) that would enable customers to "invest now" as both co-creators and consumers of their own franchised worlds. This assertion of the company's aspirations is fully realized in the "*Unhinged* Trailer" (Peers, 2022), a short-form work released alongside ALab that promises another film (or franchise) to come.[21] Like the ALab scene, the trailer allows Animal Logic to test out new software that facilitates the production of virtual landscapes–Unreal Engine and AWS Nimble Studio's cloud environment–while providing a story about the interaction between worlds or dimensions, a concept that is also apparent in some way or another in all their movies. Intermittent titles tell us that "two renegade researchers . . . will cross a line . . . to another dimension." In between these titles, we see the characters building a machine from the assets that had appeared in the promotional video before Dr. Goggles activates the device and unexpectedly blasts himself into another world. If the first promotional video mythologizes the company's tools, labor, and industrial locations, now we see them in action, building landscapes and worldbuilding in a primordial version of Australia's Local Hollywood.

With this self-mythology, the company has a way to meet the major studios at their own level by controlling the discourse around the films they make in partnership. As I have argued, the ambiguity generated through allusion and the mixing of temporal modes encourages speculation about film companies' futures as they simultaneously mythologize their past. In this spirit, we might venture another summative interpretation of this material that captures the origin myth and production identity that Animal Logic has constructed for itself. The

"unseen inventor" that films the lab with older cinematic technology represents the Australian innovators of the past–the cameramen and technicians of the pre-Renaissance era, the New Wave filmmakers, and companies such as George Miller films and Bazmark that helped launch Animal Logic's success. The toys–Dr. Goggles and Hinge–represent the contemporary brand, the company that has continued pushing the legacy of Australian filmmaking traditions. By taking a cue from Pixar's revolutionary animated film *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995) and breaking away from their masters, the service provider has become a successful Australian production company that can compete on a global market. Dr. Goggles blasts himself into a future in which he spawns a multibillion-dollar franchise complete with branded landscapes of his own.

Conclusion

Unfortunately, this future will never be realized. Dr. Goggles' franchise would now belong to Netflix, which began slowly absorbing Animal Logic into Netflix Animation Studios less than two years after purchasing the company in 2022.[22] Indeed, Netflix had already announced its purchase the month before Animal Logic released their promotional material. Other events in the post-production industry had anticipated these changes in ownership as well. Far from existing in a backyard lab, Animal Logic's studios are now globally dispersed, operating out of Vancouver and Burbank as well as Sydney in what is now Disney Studios Australia. Just as Animal Logic's identity is changing after Netflix's purchase, the Local Hollywood in which it is embedded changed its name from Fox Studios soon after Disney's 7.3-billion purchase of Fox's film and TV assets in 2019.[23]

Unsurprisingly, these changes in ownership have invited backlash from parts of the Australian film industry. What is often perceived to be at stake is the loss of "our landscapes," an anxiety that has always accompanied the presence of foreign production companies in Australia. [24] Yet, it is unlikely that these shifts in ownership will strip Australian landscape of its cultural value. As Ramon Lobato demonstrates in *Netflix Nations*, his 2019 study of the company's global expansion, governments continue to extend national sovereignty through different means, and companies that target global audiences must negotiate markets of varying local customs and tastes.[25] Just as Australian media companies and government bodies use landscape to promote filming locations to overseas investors and consumers, Netflix uses its iconography to market original Australian content that appeals to transnational audiences by conforming to established genres. This is most apparent in the marketing that surrounds "Australian Westerns" (including films like *The Furnace* (McKay, 2020) and series like *Territory* (McLean, 2024). But regional landscapes are also emphasized in the campaigns for *Tidelands* (Fraser, 2018)–a supernatural thriller whose marketing showcased Queensland "in all its striking coastal and inland glory," and for *Pine Gap*–an international thriller that revolves around the mysterious US–Australian defense facility in the "Red Center" of Australia.[26] Indeed, the stories about the inscrutable facility that have circulated since the middle of the last century have been conceived by Ross Gibson as part of the "Australian Sublime," a canon of works that feature hostile landscapes and contribute to the narrative construction of Australia's national identity.[27] Pine Gap's submergence within the landscape was once

reflective of white society's alienation from both modern technology's and the land's mysteries.[28] Today, the series frames the landscape as a space of global relations that mirrors the media industrial network that brought the Australian–American coproduction into being.

In this respect, what has changed in the era of globally dispersed film production is that landscape has become increasingly reflexive and integrated with companies' self-mythologizing agendas. Animal Logic's marketing reveals the ways that landscape's association with the national auteur cinema can be conflated with the industry's international reputation for innovation and its workforce of skilled technicians. This occurs at a moment when a crucial part of the Local Hollywood moves up the corporate hierarchy, while at the same time, the multinational conglomerates with whom it works in partnership consolidate power. Rather than lamenting the loss of "our landscapes," it would be more productive to focus on the different ways that landscape's national iconicity is reimagined as these industrial relations continue to shift.

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[2] Susan Dermody and Elizabeth Jacka first proposed a dual industry model in *The Screening of Australia, Volume 1: Anatomy of a Film Industry* (Currency Press, 1987). Scholars have revised this model since, including Deb Verhoeven, "Film, Video, DVD and Online Delivery," in *The Media and Communications in Australia* 3rd ed., ed. Stuart Cunningham and Graeme Turner (Allen & Unwin, 2010), 133–54; Ben Goldsmith, "Outward-looking Australian Cinema," *Studies of Australasian* Cinema 4 (2010): 202.

[3] Tom O'Regan, Ben Goldsmith, and Susan Ward, *Local Hollywood: Global Film Production and the Gold Coast* (University of Queensland Press, 2010).

[4] Tom O'Regan, "New Stories for a Digital Age," in *Story/Telling: The Woodford Forum*, ed. by Bronwen Levy and Ffion Murphy (Queensland University Press, 2001), 70.

[5] Ross Gibson, *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia* (Indiana University Press, 1992), 1; 69.

[6] For a literature review on approaches to worldbuilding, see Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York University Press, 2013), 113–15. Johnson has taken up Kristin Thompson's elaboration of "overdesign" and considered it against Henry Jenkins' fan-based analysis of worldbuilding, offering the term "world sharing" as an alternative concept that allows him to explore how claims of authorship are made as franchised media circulates through online networks. See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where*

Old and New Media Collide (New York University Press, 2006); Kristin Thompson, *The Frodo Franchise: The Lord of the Rings and Modern Hollywood* (University of California Press, 2007).

[7] J. T. Caldwell, "Para-Industry: Researching Hollywood's Blackwaters," *Cinema Journal* 52 (2013): 164.

[8] David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies* (University of California Press, 2006), 58.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 22.

[11] "Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'hoole," *AnimalLogic.com*, accessed 1 September 2023, https://animallogic.com/portfolio/projects/lotg/.

[12] Thomas Elsaesser, *The Persistence of Hollywood* (Routledge, 2012), 278–9.

[13] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 2001), 173.

[14] Ibid., 177.

[15] Cited in Dan Sarto and Jon Hofferman, "Animal Logic Gets 'Unhinged' with ALab Phase 2, Unreal Engine, and a Sock Puppet Scientist," *Animation World Network*, 17 November 2022, accessed 1 September 2023, https://www.awn.com/animationworld/animal-logic-gets-unhinged-alab-phase-2-unreal-engine-and-sock-puppet-scientist.

[16] Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 123.

[17] Animal Logic, "Animal Logic ALab Open Source Scene," *Animal Logic.com*, accessed 1 September 2023, https://animallogic.com/alab/.

[18] Animal Logic, "ALab & Unhinged," *Animal Logic.com*, accessed 1 September 2023, https://animallogic.com/portfolio/projects/alab- unhinged/.

[19] Ben Goldsmith, "Is Everything Awesome?" in *A Companion to Australian Cinema*, ed. Jane Landman, Felicity Collins, and Susan Bye (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 175–91.

[20] On early technological innovations in Australia, see Martha Ansara, *The Shadowcatchers: A History of Cinematography in Australia* (Austcine Publishing, 2012). On Ken G. Hall, see Adrian Danks, "Rudimentary Modernism: Ken G. Hall, Rear Projection, and 1930s Hollywood," in *American–Australian Cinema: Transnational Connections*, ed. Adrian Danks, Stephen Gaunson, and Peter C. Kunze (Springer, 2018), 19–40; Stuart Cunningham describes Charles Chauvel's "locationism" in "Charles Chauvel: The Last Decade," *Continuum: The Australian Journal of Media & Culture* 1 (1987): 26–46.

[21] Animal Logic, "Unhinged Trailer," *YouTube*, accessed 1 September 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4otZVJgGZYyxsk7ZKk67I.

[22] Sean Slater, "Animal Logic to merge into Netflix Animation, CEO Sharon Taylor Resigns," *if*, January 2024, accessed 1 September 2024, https://if.com.au/animal-logic-to-merge-into-netflix-animation-ceo-sharon-taylor-resigns/.

[23] Emily St. James, "Here's What Disney Owns after the Massive Disney/Fox Merger," Vox, March 2019, accessed 1 September 2023, https://www.vox.com/culture/2019/3/20/18273477/disney-fox-merger-deal-details-marvel-x-men.

[24] For example, in 1969, media personalities Barry Jones and Phillip Adams persuaded newly appointed Prime Minister John Gorton that something had to be done to

forestall "the American takeover of our imagination" and formed an interim Film Committee that would travel to study government-funded industries abroad. Upon his return, Adams began a report for Gorton with the words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident. It is time to see our own landscapes, hear our own voices and dream our own dreams." David Stratton, *The Last New Wave: The Australian Film Revival* (Angus & Robertson, 1980), 13.

[25] Ramon Lobato, *Netflix Nations: The Geography of Digital Distribution* (New York University Press, 2019).

[26] Footnote cited in Stuart Cunningham and Alexa Scarlata, "New Forms of Internationalisation? The Impact of Netflix in Australia," *Media International Australia* 177 (2020): 149–64.

[27] Gibson, *South of the West*, 17.

[28] Ibid., 91.

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